

The participation is more than vicarious. Some of the foreign policy demands directed at Ottawa are in fact demands directed through Ottawa at Washington. The intense interest of many Canadians in Central America, for example, transcends any direct role that Canada plays in the region. Much of the interest is in having the Canadian government openly, and directly, pressure the U.S. government to change its policies. The reluctance of successive Canadian governments to play this kind of role in Washington has been a source of considerable frustration for those Canadians especially concerned with Central America.

This unique focus on Washington stands out by comparison with how Canadians approach Moscow. Even though concern for the suffering of the Afghan people at the hands of Soviet troops is strongly felt, Canadians can not relate to the domestic Soviet debate, and the issue is treated strictly as a problem of external relations.

The committee devoted considerable attention to the role of the media in shaping the way Canadians think about international affairs. We arranged two panels devoted entirely to discussing this theme. The paradox revealed by the panels is that during the same period when the interest of Canadians in the external world grew dramatically, Canada became more dependent on foreign communications media. In this respect, Canada is no different from other countries not represented among the large media organizations now competing in the world communications market. More important, representatives of Canadian radio and television networks and newspapers told us they are a long way from possessing a satisfactory capacity for gathering foreign news. For example, not one Canadian television correspondent is based in Central and South America, Africa or the Middle East. With the growing cost of news gathering and satellite transmission, this situation is likely to deteriorate. To be sure, some Canadian media organizations deserve credit for maintaining foreign bureaux and for recent increases in the number of bureaux. Nevertheless, Canadians depend heavily on foreign news agencies for their foreign news. In consequence, they are treated to news and analysis viewed in a perspective different than would be the case were the reporters and analysts Canadian.

This is a problem of critical importance. The way Canadians and their government assess international developments and the way Canada acts in the world are at stake. We believe that our task is to focus public attention on the absence of a sufficient national capacity for foreign news gathering. Without such a capacity, Canadians cannot be expected to perceive clearly the international dimensions of their own interests. This leaves both the country and its citizens less effective on the international stage.

Heightened public interest has major implications for Canadian foreign policy. Over three-quarters of all the written submissions and letters we received from the public dealt with three broad concerns: human rights in South Africa and Central America, peace and arms control, and development assistance. (See Annex A at the end of this chapter.) Whatever the previously perceived national interest in these matters, the government must take careful note of such indications of intense and pervasive public interest because its effect is to place these concerns on the national agenda.

At the same time, we were surprised that we received only one brief devoted to Canadian relations with Western Europe, none relating to the Commonwealth or *La Francophonie*, and very few dealing with relations with South America, South Asia, China or Eastern Europe. When we asked specialists in each of these areas why we were receiving so little comment from them, their response was to express general satisfaction with the state of Canadian policy in their fields of interest. In the circumstances, they did not feel the need to put forward their opinions.